

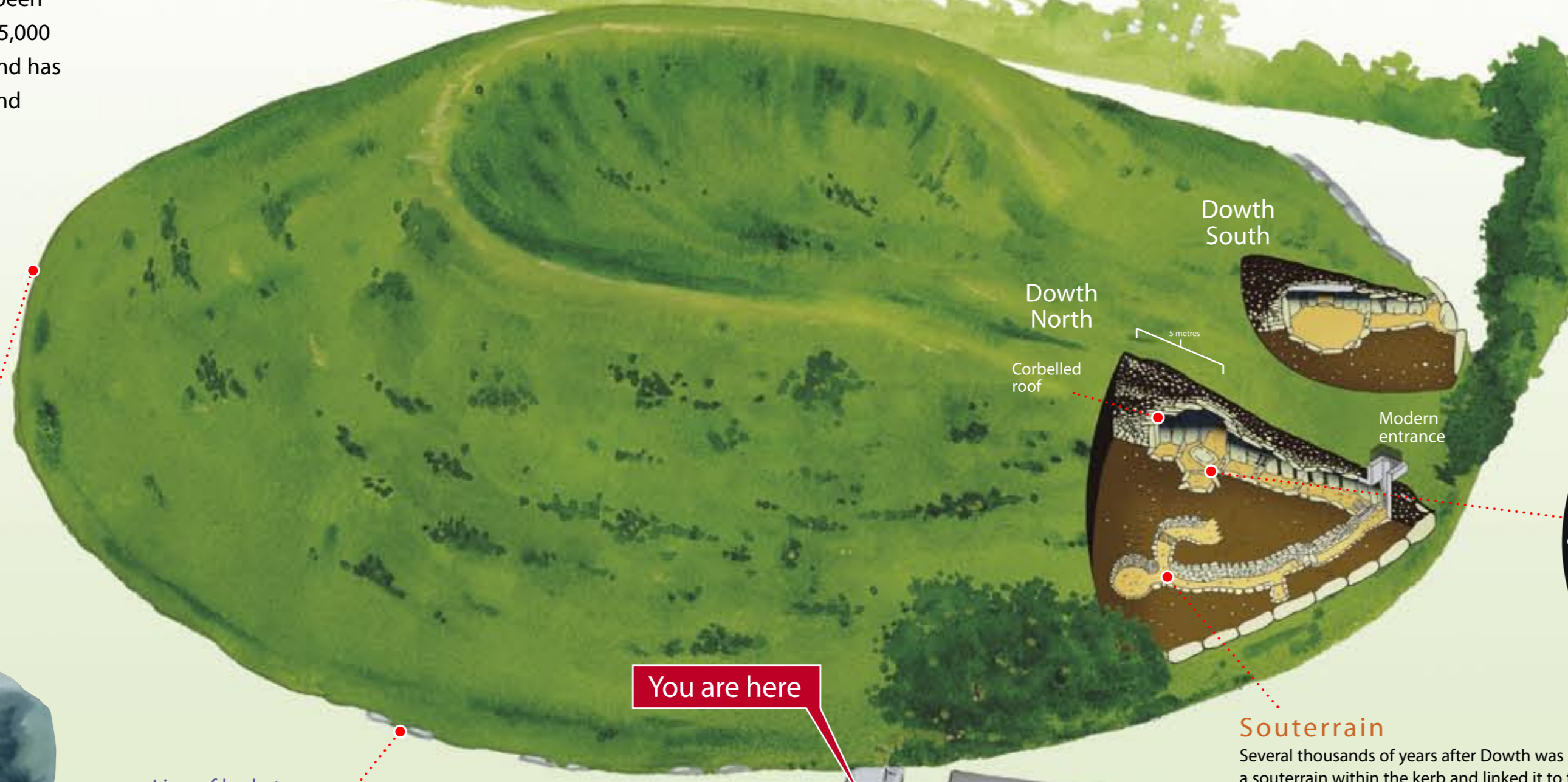
Dowth is one of the three great passage tombs of Brú na Bóinne. Although as large as Newgrange and Knowth it is less well known and has not been excavated in recent times. Constructed in the Neolithic or Stone Age about 5,000 years ago, the mound is surrounded by a kerb of an estimated 115 stones and has two tombs facing westwards. There are smaller tombs in fields to the east and south east of the large mound.

Mythology

The text of medieval manuscripts known as Dindseanchas explains how Dowth (Dubad) got its name. They tell how all the men of Ireland were commanded by the King to come together for a day to build a tower that would reach the heavens. The King's sister secretly stopped the sun in the sky by magic so that there would be an endless day. As time wore on the men of Ireland became exhausted and realised they had been tricked. However the magic spell was broken when the King and his sister slept together. The work on the great mound was abandoned as darkness fell and it was said that Dubad (darkness) would be the name of this place from that day.

Kerbstones

Despite damage, slippage and interference much of the original 85-metre diameter kerb can still be traced. About half of the kerbstones are visible and 15 of these are carved. The most dramatic of these is kerbstone 51, sometimes referred to as the Stone of the Seven Suns.



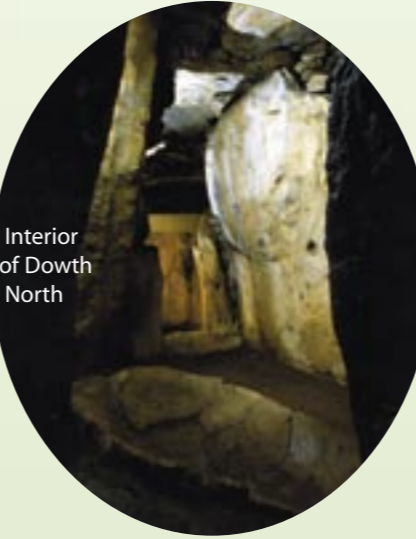
Line of kerbstones around Dowth

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Excavation

In 1847, a large cutting was made into the mound. The aim of those who dug this trench was to find a central chamber. There are few surviving finds from this work but it is known that human and animal bone were found as well as a number of objects from Early Christian times. There has also been quarrying on the western side of the mound. The large crater on top of the monument is as a result of this interference.

The monument was taken into State Care in 1882 and the mound was surveyed and studied in detail by M.J. and Claire O'Kelly in the 1970's.



Interior of Dowth North

Souterrain

Several thousands of years after Dowth was built people living on or near the mound constructed a souterrain within the kerb and linked it to the passage of Dowth North. It was below ground and invisible from the surface. Such souterrains were used for the storage of important commodities and the provision of a safe refuge in time of danger.

Dowth North

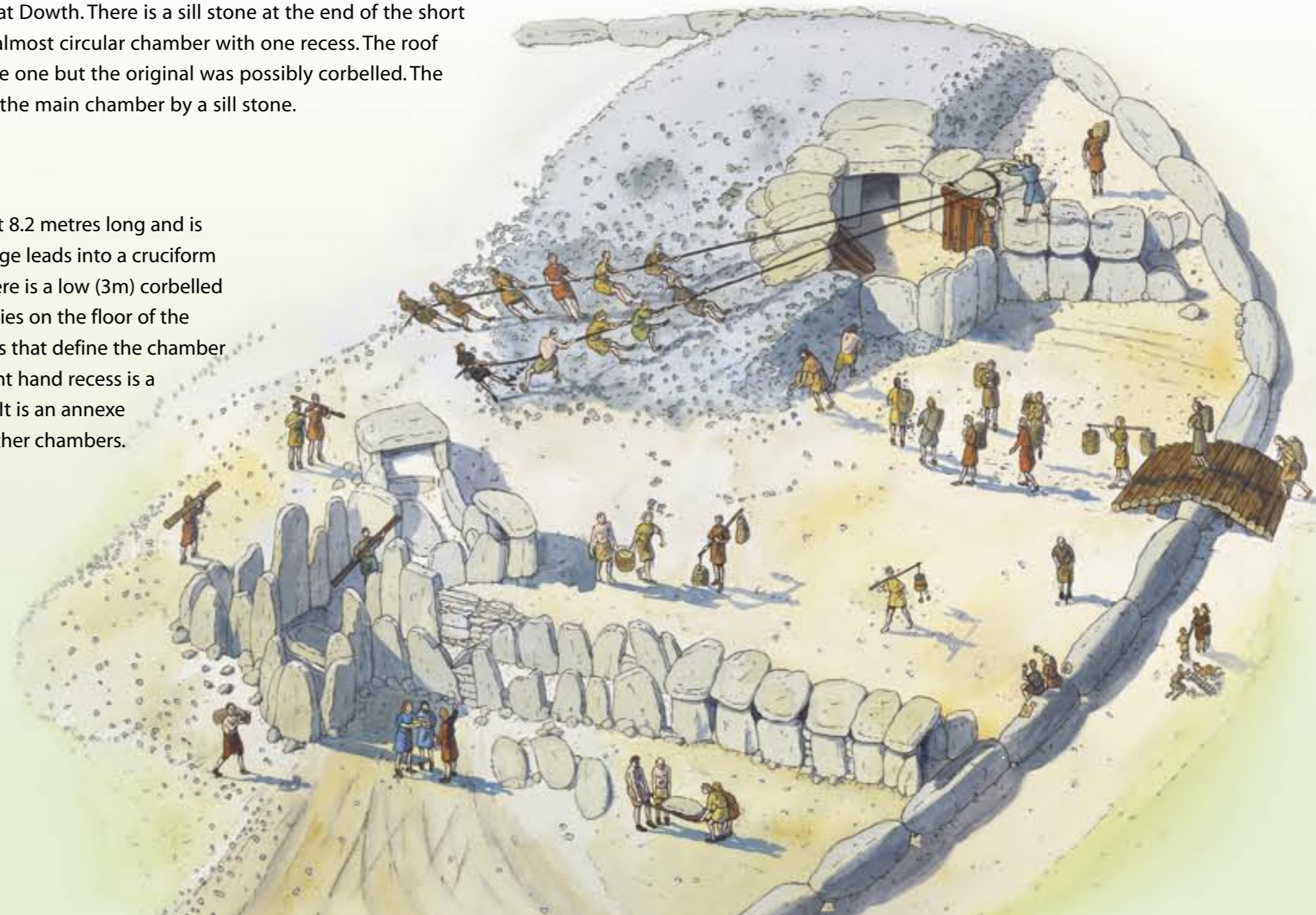
The passage of this tomb is at present 8.2 metres long and is divided by three sill stones. The passage leads into a cruciform chamber with three side recesses. There is a low (3m) corbelled roof. A large stone basin (1.4m x 1m) lies on the floor of the central chamber. The four huge stones that define the chamber space are almost 3m high. Off the right hand recess is a most unusual feature. It is an annexe containing two further chambers.

Dowth South

This is the smaller of the two tombs at Dowth. There is a sill stone at the end of the short (3.3m) passage, which leads into an almost circular chamber with one recess. The roof of this chamber is a modern, concrete one but the original was possibly corbelled. The recess to the right is separated from the main chamber by a sill stone.

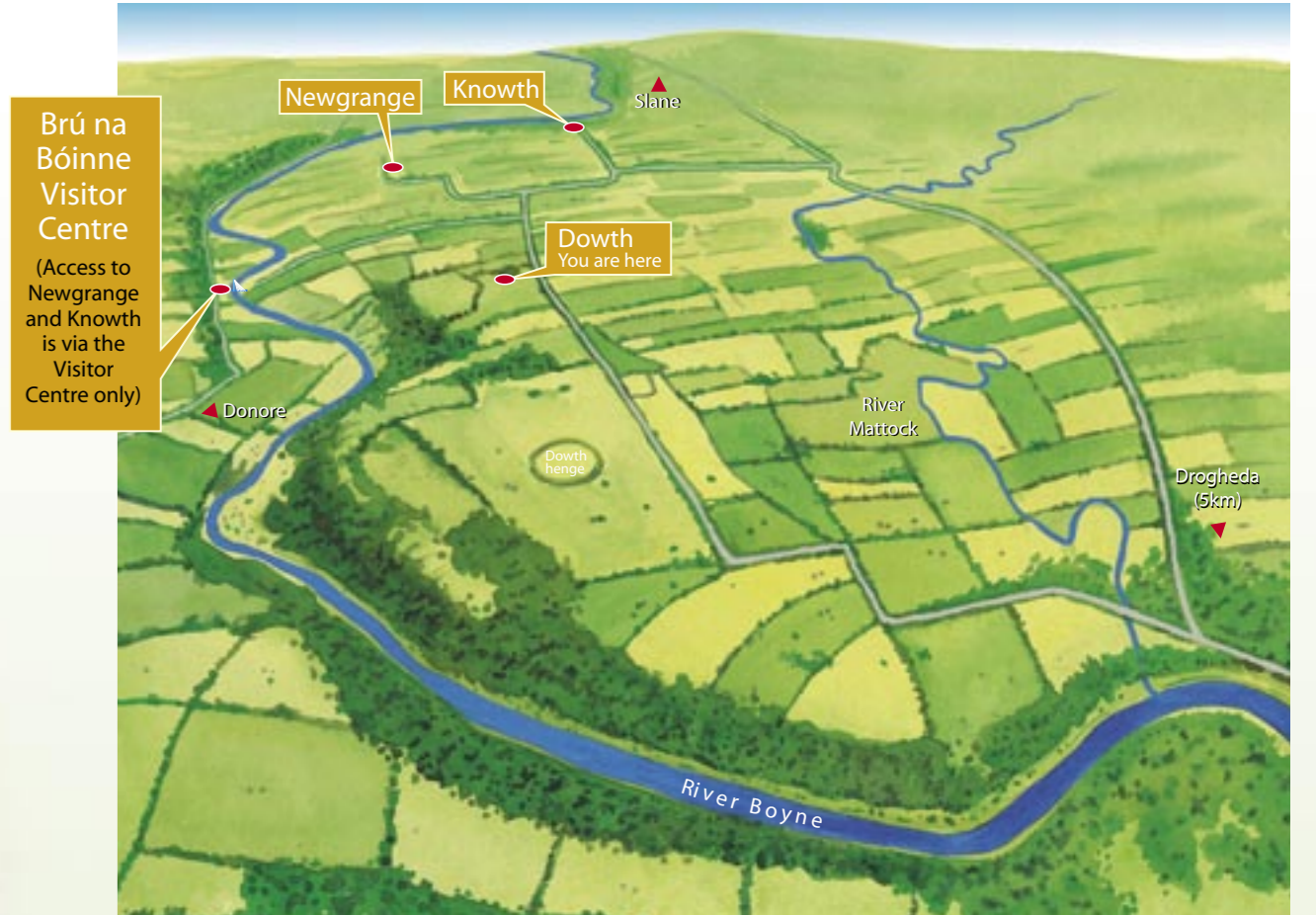
Burial Chambers

There are two burial chambers in the mound within 25 metres of one another. The passages are considerably shorter than those found at Newgrange and at Knowth but the chambers are as large and contain some of the biggest stones found at any of the sites.



Brú na Bóinne

Brú na Bóinne is the name given to one of the world's most important archaeological landscapes. In recognition of this importance UNESCO has designated the area a World Heritage Site. The most spectacular monuments are the passage tombs, which remained a focus for activity and tradition long after their formal use as burial places ended.



Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centre (Access to Newgrange and Knowth is via the Visitor Centre only)



Carving on orthostat in Dowth North